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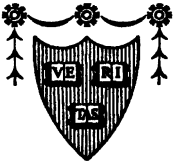
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AN INQUIRY

INTO THE

VALIDITY OF THE SCRUPLE

TO CALL THE SCRIPTURES

THE WORD OF GOD.

BY RICHARD BALL,

AUTHOR OF "HOLY SCRIPTURE THE TEST OF TRUTH."

LONDON:

HAMILTON, ADAMS, & Co.; EDMUND FRY & SON.

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"ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God." 2 Tim. iii. 16.

"*Thy word* is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Ps. cxix. 105.

"*The words* that I speak unto you *they are spirit and they are life.*" John vi. 63.

"Thou hast *the words of eternal life*" John vi. 68.

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received *the word of God* which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, *the word of God*, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." Thess. ii. 13.

"Thus it was with the Apostles, the work of God confirmed *the word of God.*" Gurney's Essays, p. 95.

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AN INQUIRY,

&c.

FROM the first rise of the Society of Friends down to the present day, a scruple has been entertained by them to apply the term *word of God* to the Bible, on the ground of its appertaining so emphatically to our Saviour, that it was desirable to restrict its application to him. At first sight one is disposed to sympathize with this apparent tenderness for the honour due to our Lord and Master. But if on further examination it should appear to have originated in low and inadequate views of the divine authority and efficacy of God's word, and, moreover, to have been coupled with the exaltation of a fancied

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*inward word** we shall see the dangerous tendency of this assumed scruple, which rests on so unsound a foundation. Surely it is not honouring the Saviour to designate his words as "a dead letter," or "the letter which killeth," when he himself declared them to be both "spirit and life." "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." John vi. 63.

* *Barclay* calls it, (Apol. p. 166)—"The seed of the Kingdom, this saving, supernatural, and sufficient *word*"; and p. 167,—"This saving, spiritual light *is the Gospel* which the apostle saith is preached in every creature under Heaven." *Fisher* says "*We own not the alterable and much altered outward text and letter or Scripture, but the Holy truth and inward light and Spirit,*" &c. and *Barclay* says, "Though we do acknowledge the Scriptures to be very heavenly and divine writings," yet he would have us bring them to be tried by the inward word or light, for he adds—"Even so the writings and sayings of *all men* we must *bring to the word of God*, I mean the Eternal Word, and *if they agree hereunto we stand there.*" That is, the written word of God is to be tried by the Gospel in man!

For the same sentiment more largely expressed, see Geo. Fox's "Great Mystery,"—"Doctrinals,"—"Saul's Errand to Damascus," &c.—In an early work of *George Fox's*, 1654–6 entitled "News coming up out of the North sounding towards the South," &c.—He thus speaks of the Holy Scriptures, addressing those whom he called carnal professors, "your teacher is carnall made by the will of man and your originall is carnall, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, *and your word is carnall, the Letter*, and the light is carnall, the Letter"; and a little further on in the same paper, he says "So dust is the serpent's meat, their originall is but dust, *which is but the Letter which is death.*" "Their church is dust," &c.; and lastly, "*and their Gospel is dust, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which is the Letter*, and all this is in the carnall mind, feeding it, which is the enemy against God," &c.

Such passages as these are lamentable proofs of the per-

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That writers who could thus speak of the Holy Scripture—who could call them "a fallible standard," "a nose of wax," "a corrupt, corrupted, and corruptible stream" should object to call them the *word of God*, is natural enough, but that men who affirm their full belief in the declarations that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" should refuse to do so, appears strangely inconsistent.

If the Bible be not God's word whose word is it? and if it be His word why scruple to call it so? And if, as is the case with Friends generally, it be acknowledged to be the revealed will and word of God—to have been given by inspiration of God—then, ought not such seriously to weigh the effect of objecting to give to the Bible that title which characterises it as such. There appears to me in this case to be a danger *peculiar* to our Society, because we cannot disguise the fact that very questionable views of Holy Scripture were entertained and expressed by a large proportion of our early writers; and this continued objection to apply to the Bible that title which so emphatically expresses its divine authority, tends to strengthen these questionable views, and confers upon them additional weight and sanction.

verting influence of this unscriptural notion of *the word in man*, for on other occasions the early Friends expressed themselves more reverently of Holy Scripture.

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To profess a belief in the inspiration of Holy Scripture—to acknowledge it as the revealed will and law of God, and yet to hesitate to apply to it that epithet which alone definitely expresses the idea of such belief, appears a refinement of scruple which is neither legitimate nor safe.

It is not *legitimate*, because, as generally stated, it is against applying a term to the *written word* which it is asserted ought to be restricted exclusively to the *Incarnate Word*, while there is in fact no scriptural ground for such an assertion, as will be shewn by the repeated instances in which the term is so applied in the sacred writings.

It is not *safe*, because the scruple has an indirect tendency to diminish a due reverence for the Bible, —to open the question of its inspiration and consequent authority, and to bring it down towards a level with other writings; and thus to minister to the natural rebellion of man's heart against the authority of God's Law.†

† See Barclay as quoted before, page 2. See also Penn, Fisher, &c. "The Truth Vindicated," does no more than boldly carry out the views of these writers to their natural results; indeed the main object of the work seems to be to bring down *the written word of God*, to a level with mere human writings! The conceited ignorance betrayed in this wretched book is only exceeded by the flippant vulgarity with which it treats of those sacred subjects which the wisest and the best men have ever approached with humility and reverence.

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If the Bible be given by inspiration of God, which is granted,—how is it not his word?—and if it be his word, where is the objection to its being thus designated? There are many who will perhaps be ready to question the propriety of thus directing the serious attention of the Society to what may appear to them a mere question of words: but "words are the signs of our ideas" and the connexion between these signs and our notions of the things signified is so subtle that we ought jealously to watch every form of expression which tends in any degree to lower the dignity of the written word.

Although this scruple is largely insisted upon in the works of our early Friends, and although it is entertained by many in the present day, it was not perhaps worthy of much attention; but when a large Committee appointed by the Yearly Meeting to assist in the investigation of an important *doctrinal* controversy, issues a document, in which this scruple is formally and authoritatively re-asserted, the body at large becomes implicated, and it is time to ascertain how far our early Friends had grounds for its adoption, or this Committee for its formal recognition.

The opinion of the Committee on this point is delivered in the following words. "We believe it safest to restrict the application of the epithet (word of God) to the Saviour." No reason is assigned, no authority is stated, no text is quoted,—it rests solely on the *dictum* of the body. Let us then in this case,

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as in all others, simply ask—What saith the Scripture? more especially as our early writers, and those who retain their views, assert somewhat dogmatically that they are *willing* to grant to the Bible all that it demands for itself. They ought therefore to be equally willing to give up all that stands not on its authority. Is there then any text which authorises the assertion that "*it is safest to restrict the term word of God to the Saviour*," I know of none, while numerous passages may be cited from almost every book of the Bible which imply, assume, or declare divine authority, and if it be the recorded revelation of the Divine Mind, it is essentially *the word of God*.†

† The giving forth of the ten commandments is solemnly announced in these striking terms—"And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God," &c. (Ex. xx. 1). Thus also Samuel bid Saul stand still (letting the servants pass on before them) while he shewed him the *word of God* (1st Sam. ix. 27). Again (2nd Kings, xii. 22) we are told that "the *word of God* came to Shemaiah, the man of God, saying—Thus saith the Lord," &c. Again in 1st Chron. xvii. 3, it is said "*The word of God* came to Nathan saying," &c.—and we have the command recited in the remaining twenty-four verses of that chapter. Again Isaiah exclaims—"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the *word of our God* shall stand for ever." Again the Almighty speaking by David says, "Give *ear*, O! my people to my *law*, incline your *ears* to the *words of my mouth* (Ps. 78. 1) and speaking by Isaiah, he says—"I am the Lord thy God, * * * I have put my *words* in thy mouth" (Is. li. 15, 16). —and by Ezekiel, "Thou shalt speak *my words*" (Ez. ii. 7). and "Speak with *my words* unto them" (Ez. iii. 4). "And the Lord said, Hear now *my words*," &c. (Micah xii. 6). "The Lord said, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear *my words*, that they may learn to fear me,"

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There is not perhaps any passage, which strictly speaking, applies the term to the Bible as a whole, but it is most important to observe that our Lord by his repeated reference to the Old Testament Scriptures has conferred upon them the authority of his sanction, while the absence of any hint of caution not to receive the *whole* as divinely inspired, confers upon it the impress of his implied recognition. Moreover the very parties entertaining this scruple have again and again repeated their entire belief in the apostolic declaration that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God:"—it is obvious therefore, that before such a scruple can be sustained, this oft repeated declaration of the body must virtually be abandoned, and the opinion implied, that to *portions* only of Holy Writ does the Society assign the character of a divine revelation.

If, as Friends acknowledge, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," then is it all of God, and if all of God, then his word; and surely not less his word because written by "holy men of God who

&c. (Deut. iv. 10). And observe the emphatic manner in which the Almighty insists on the divine authority of his word,—"Therefore shall ye lay up *these my words* in your heart, and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thine house and upon thy gates" (Deut. xi. 18, 19, 20).

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spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And if this be true, then is Holy Scripture of a homogeneous character, and he who doubts of the divine authority of one part may as well doubt of the divine authority of any other part, and if of any part why not of the whole? The objection taken from Paul's avowal that he spake some things by permission and not by commandment is untenable, for this careful exception of the Apostle proves our rule.

The danger of such an opinion, even if only *implied*, is obvious, for if one set of people are at liberty thus to doubt of the divine origin of *some portions* of the Bible,† others are at equal liberty to entertain the same doubts respecting other *portions*, and if these are all thus permitted to throw doubts over the divine authority of whatever portions may appear to their fallible judgments of a questionable character, the infidel has thereby a strong argument ready furnished to his hands on which to found his rejection of the divine origin and authority of the *whole*.

† Even office-bearers in the Society have been known, when pressed with arguments drawn from the Apostolic Epistles, to endeavour to disparage their authority by speaking of them as the writings of *fallible men*. Does the fallibility of the men militate against the infallibility of that Holy Spirit, by whom they were "moved," and instructed what to write? So it is that practically the Quaker doctrine of the Inward Light leads the ignorant and presumptuous to receive as of divine authority, those portions only of the Bible which they fancy to be witnessed as such by "the testimony of truth" in their own minds.

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The peculiar danger which lies as it were concealed in this scruple, is, in its evident connexion with the denial, by the early Friends, that the Scriptures were the primary rule; and the manner in which this subject is treated by them, justifies a belief that they entertained very inadequate views of the divine authority of the Bible, and the painful consequence is that the most serious errors may be supported from their writings.†

The Bible as a whole is the revelation of the will and mind of God to man, or it is not. If it is, where is the reasonableness of the objection to the disputed term? If it is not, then we have indeed been following cunningly devised fables, and the foundations of Christianity tremble beneath us.

I would press upon such as thankfully accept the Scriptures as the "lively Oracles" of God, the danger involved in this, as it appears to me, unauthorised scruple. But such may reply:—Our only ob-

† I would instance Fisher's elaborate work entitled, "The Rustic's alarm to the Rabies," a work containing nearly as much letter press as the Bible, and which is a laboured attempt to bring its divine character down to a level with the writings of fallible men. From this work, which still remains as one of the accredited books of the Society, the author of "The Truth Vindicated," may support his most deistical positions. This belongs to that "Rudis indigestaque moles" that rude and undigested heap, which is *earnestly* and *indiscriminately* recommended to the diligent perusal of our *young* friends. Are such writings really part and parcel of that Quakerism which has been so broadly affirmed to be "Christianity, without addition, without diminution, and without compromise"?

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ject is to honour our Lord and Master by restricting to him exclusively a title which Holy Scripture so emphatically applies to him. The force of this is fully granted, so far as regards the fact that the term is *emphatically* applied to our Saviour, but the question at issue is, whether it is applied *exclusively* to him? To enable us to form a judgment on this point it will be only needful to refer to those texts in which the term is applied to the spoken, to the written, and to the Incarnate word.

Leaving, the numerous passages in the Old Testament in which the revelations of the divine will and commands are termed "my word," "thy word," "his word," "the word of God's mouth," "the word of God's lips," "God's word," "God's voice," "the word of the Holy One"; leaving these, we may observe that there are forty passages in which in our English version the term "*Word of God*" occurs. Of these there are thirty-five in which the Greek so translated is *logos*,* this term being used alike for the written, spoken, and Incarnate word. The remaining five are different cases of the noun *rhema*. In nearly all the cases in which

* See Mark vii. 13. Luke v. 1. Luke viii. 11. 21. Luke xi, 28. John x. 35. Acts iv. 31. Acts vi. 2. 7. Acts viii. 14. Acts xi. 1. Acts xiii. 7, 44, 46. Acts xix. 20. Rom. ix. 6. 1 Cor. xiv. 36. 2 Cor. ii. 17. 2 Cor. iv. 2. Col. i. 25. 1 Thes. ii. 13. 1 Tim. iv. 5. 2 Tim. ii. 9. Titus ii. 5. Heb. iv. 12. and xi. 3. and xiii. 7. 1 Pet. i. 23. 2 Pet. iii. 5. 1 John ii. 14. Rev. i. 2. 9. Rev vi. 9. and xix. 13, and xx. 4.

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the term *logos* occurs, it is applied to the *spoken* or *written word.* Thus our Lord himself declared in the parable of the sower, "The seed is *the word of God,*" (Luke viii. 11.)—that, "Blessed are they that hear the *word of God* and *keep it*" (Luke xi. 28).—and that his brethren are "those that hear *the word of God* and *do it*" (Luke viii. 21); and here we may incidentally remark, that in these passages our Lord expressly calls his own declarations *the word of God.* "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God." If then those declarations when spoken by our Lord were essentially *the word of God,* are they less *the word of God* because recorded by the inspired Apostle? Thus again our Lord in reproving the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, declared that they made "*the word of God* of none effect by *their traditions*" (Mark vii. 13), clearly contrasting the law or word of God with the traditions of their fathers by which it was made of none effect. And how striking are his words when he answered the Jews, saying "Is it not written in your law, I said ye are Gods,† if he called them Gods to whom *the word of God* came, and *the Scripture cannot be broken,* say ye, &c. (John x. 34, 35).

The preached word is also thus designated, "They spake *the word of God* with boldness" (Acts iv. 31); and on another occasion it is recorded, that "the

† If ye called them (the judges) Gods to whom the Law was committed &c.

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whole city came to hear *the word of God*" (Acts xiii. 44),—and in verse 46, "It was necessary that *the word of God* should first have been spoken to you, but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts xiii. 46).

In some of these passages our Lord himself applies the term both to the Old Testament Scriptures and to his own words, and yet the Committee think it *safest* to *restrict* the term to the Saviour! thus setting up mere human authority above the positive declarations of Holy Scripture itself. That it should not be so restricted is proved by these passages; while it is equally clear that the term is applied in a most emphatic manner to our blessed Lord himself—to Him who "was in the beginning,"—who "was with God," who "was God," by whom "all things were made." In that sublime passage of the apocalypse where the Divine Redeemer is represented as "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood" it immediately follows "and his name is called *the Word of God*." Rev. xix. 13. Does it not then appear just as erroneous to *restrict* the term to the Saviour as it does to abate one tittle of the peculiar and sublime emphasis with which it is applied to him?

Thus we have the decided testimony of Holy Scripture generally, and of our Lord himself, to the fact that the term "the word of God" may be applied alike to the spoken, to the written, and to the Incarnate word. May it not then be asked in reply

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to the unsustained opinion given in writing by the Yearly Meeting's Committee; Is it *safe* thus to minister to doubts of the divine character of the written word: Is it not rather to "inflict a wound upon the truth" for what is the Bible but a proclamation of the King of kings?—and ought we not to remember that a refusal to give to that proclamation its peculiarly expressive title, may open the way for some to question its inspiration, and for the more daring to cast off its authority. "I am unable to separate any honour or dishonour done to God from that which is done to his word."

How emphatic are the words of our blessed Lord in that sublime prayer contained in the xvii. chap. of John. "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept *thy word.* Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For *I have given unto them* THE WORDS *which thou gavest me, and they have received them,* and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." * * * "I have given them *thy word;* and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: *thy word* is truth."

There is one text in which the questioned term *word of God* (*rhema* here) occurs, which ought specially to be noticed, because, though evidently re-

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ferring to the written word, it has been so often differently applied. Paul in concluding his Epistle to the Ephesians, chap. vi. exhorts the brethren to "be strong in the Lord," to "put on the whole armour of God"—"the breastplate of righteousness"—but "above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*"

Now what term could be selected more significant of that great weapon of the Spirit,—that "divider between the joints and marrow"? The *weapon* of the Spirit cannot be the Spirit himself, and our Lord can hardly be correctly designated as the sword of the Spirit!† The written word is indeed the sword,—the sharp weapon of the Spirit; the effectual

† The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow," &c. (Heb. iv. 12). As the Lord said by his Prophet Hosea, "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have *slain* them by the *words of my mouth*" (Hosea vi. 5). And thus God spake by Jeremiah xxiii. 28, 29, " * * He that hath *my word*, let him *speak my word* faithfully. * * Is not *my word* like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" And as a further proof that this sword of the Spirit is the written word, we may adduce Rev. xix. 15, where almost immediately after that significant and awful description of the Incarnate Word, as "He who was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God," it is said "And out of his *mouth* goeth a *sharp sword* that with it he should smite the nations"; and in verse 21, "The remnant were slain with the *sword* of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded *out of his mouth.*" (See also Rev. ii. 16). Again in Isaiah xi. 4,

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offensive and defensive weapon of the spiritual warfare. The sword is the grand instrument in the enlargement of temporal kingdoms, and *this* sword wielded with vivifying power by the Holy Spirit, is the grand instrument in the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom. The preached word is but the proclamation by the living voice of the glad tidings of the written word, and both are going forth with renewed energy to the very ends of the earth, "conquering and to conquer."

Having expressed my belief that the scruple in question originated in low views of the divine authority and efficacy of the Bible; and that it was connected with unscriptural notions of an *inward word*, to which it was virtually referred for its sanction and authority;—and having pointed out what appears to be a very unwarrantable setting up of human authority, on the part of the Yearly Meeting's Committee, above the positive declarations of Holy Scripture,—I shall now advert to the *fact* that while our early writers *refused to give the title the word of God to the Bible*, they actually applied it, both directly and inferentially, *to their own writings!*

"* * and he shall smite the earth with *the rod of his mouth*, and with the *breath of his lips shall he slay* the wicked"; and in 2 Thess. ii. 8, we have the same figure, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall *consume with the spirit of his mouth*, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

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It is painful to advert to this subject, when we consider that these authors, especially their more decidedly controversial works, were rapidly passing into a merited and happy oblivion, when the Yearly Meeting of 1835, issued in its memorable epistle of counsel the ill-judged advice to their indiscriminate perusal. Yet even this advice has we trust been overruled for good, by bringing their doctrinal errors more clearly under notice; but, there is on the part of many in the present day, such a marked jealousy for the characters of these writings, that it is impossible to question their doctrinal statements without incurring the charge of being an enemy. While the same parties contemplate with affecting indifference, and even with approbation, works whose evident tendency is to disparage Holy Scripture under the guise of high spirituality.

I shall pass over the mass of these writings, in which, in many instances, the highest claims to divine authority are set up, and chiefly confine myself *at present*, to a single *recent* publication. I allude to the "Life of William Demsbury" edited by John Barclay, and published in the early part of *this year*, (1836).†

It is important to bear in mind as a general principle, that devotedness and the patient endurance of

† This publication appears under somewhat of a Society sanction, as orders for it are to be addressed to William Manly, the Society's officer, at the Friends' Meeting House, Houndsditch.

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persecution even unto death, is, of itself, no proof of the correctness of the principles suffered for. Who can doubt the sincere devotedness of such a man as Dewsbury, who spent the greatest portion of his life in noisome dungeons? But we are not therefore to subscribe to his doctrinal statements, or justify his claiming such high authority for his communications. When we consider the natural effect of persecution on the human mind, especially on minds under a high degree of religious excitement, we shall be prepared to make great excuse for the heat and extravagance manifested by our early Friends, and for the very objectionable terms they too frequently employed. But while, from their peculiar circumstances, and also from the temper of the times in which they lived, we can thus make large allowance for the excited manner and intemperate language of these devoted men, suffering under a relentless and bitter persecution;—there is no similar excuse for the republication in the *present day*, of works which contain so much which is at variance with sound doctrine, and with the form of sound words; and for which, notwithstanding, the *highest claims of divine authority* are set up. It will I think be admitted that the following quotations from the work now under our notice fully substantiate this charge.

In p. 63 after some introductory remarks, shewing that Dewsbury was among the first of the early friends who paid attention to the establishment of a

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regular discipline in the infant Society. The Editor remarks "The following prefatory address will shew the high authority under which W. Dewsbury believed himself to be moving on this occasion." It is as follows. "*This is the word of the living God* to his church that he hath called and chosen out of the world to place his name in, to order and guide in his pure wisdom to his praise and glory, who alone is worthy, God over all, blessed for ever. That in every meeting &c. there be chosen such (describing them) to take the care and charge of the flock of God in that place. And this is *the word of the living God* to you who are chosen——watch over the flock of God, you to whom I commit the charge * * * "; and in painful consistency with the fanatical extravagance of this claim to *plenary inspiration* we have in the same document, p. 65 the following assumption of divine power. "In the power of Christ you shall command the unclean spirit in all his appearances within you and without, and he shall submit to the power of God in you," &c.! There is one more passage in the body of the work which I shall transcribe, and ought not those who now so strenuously recommend the works of our early fathers to consider that the natural effect of having *such matter* forced upon our notice is to excite a spirit of investigation into the grounds on which their high pretensions are founded?

In p. 66, W. D. says "I charge you in the presence of the Lord God Almighty, and by his power,

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to examine your consciences every one of you, which will witness with *me*, for *I am with you though absent in the body, and see you with the invisible and eternal eye, from which* in the measure which the Lord hath opened *nothing can be hid"!*—and, further on "I see you, who you are, in whom the seed suffers; in some under one deceit, and some in another; and to the *all seeing eye*, that light in your consciences I direct you, *which is the eye with which I see you!* and every one of you dwell in the pure light which is in your consciences, and you will see yourselves, and *witness these lines to be from the mouth of the living God*, before whom all is naked and bare"! Here we have, first, an unequivocal assumption of one of the divine attributes. He professes to see those from whom he is absent in the body, with "*the invisible and eternal eye from which* in the measure which the Lord hath opened *nothing can be hid"!* and secondly we have the most positive assertion that the lines containing this awful assumption are "from *the mouth of the living God* before whom all is naked and bare"! It is grievous to reflect that such matter is republished by a minister in our Society in 1836. Are such works likely to increase our veneration for our early Friends? Are they not more likely to lead unreflecting minds to condemn the whole mass as indiscriminately as they have been recommended?*

* To shew that this fanatical assumption of divine authority was not confined to the illiterate, I subjoin a passage

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In the appendix we have the following repetitions of the same language;—and so far as I have observed, without a single word of disapprobation or doubt from the Editor.

P. 288," *Thus saith the Lord God* of Heaven and Earth to thee Oliver Cromwell, called Lord Protector, why dost thou slight *my counsel*," &c. &c.

P. 291, To King Charles II. "Oh King hear the *word of the Lord God which came to me about the 6th hour in the morning* of the 20th day of the 3rd month, 1661. Thus saith the Lord, &c."

from our "unanswered and unanswerable apologist," Barclay, with which he concludes his Apology; "that little spark (Quakerism) that hath appeared *shall* grow to the consuming of whatsoever shall stand up to oppose it! *the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it!* yea he that hath risen in a small remnant *shall* arise and go on by the same arm of power in his spiritual manifestation until he hath conquered all his enemies, until all the Kingdoms of the earth become the Kingdom of Christ Jesus."

Here Barclay assumes the *prophetic* office; he declares that *the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it*, that whatsoever opposed Quakerism should be consumed. Episcopacy opposed it: Independency opposed it. Where are the symptoms of their being consumed by Quakerism?

George Whitehead places such sayings *above* Holy Scripture!—these are his words (Penn's works Vol. 2, p. 674 Folio) "That which was spoken from the spirit of Truth in *any is of as great authority as the Scriptures and Chapters are, and greater*, as proceeding immediately from that spirit, as Christ's words were of greater authority when he spake than the Pharisees reading the letter!" And in strict conformity with this, Penn affirms that "what was a commandment to any servants of God, in old times,—*that such are not commandments to us, unless required by the same spirit anew!*" *Reason against Railing, Art.* 21

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P. 297, A general Epistle *given forth from* the *spirit of the Lord to be read* in his fear *to the assemblies of the church* of the first born, gathered in these northern countries and islands, wherever the people of the Lord are scattered over the face of the whole earth!" &c.

In p. 160, in a postcript to an epistle, he directs that "When the church of the living God is met together, this to be *read in the fear of the Lord God.*"

Let the reader couple these passages with the objection felt by many friends to reading the Holy Scriptures in our religious assemblies. Is this to be taken as a practical illustration of what friends mean by putting the Holy Scriptures "in their right place"?

Further one of W. Dewsbury's Epistles given at p. 180, concludes in these words "*The mouth of the Lord of Hosts hath spoken it*"! And again in p. 196. in an Epistle to Friends "The *word of the Lord* to his beloved city New Jerusalem, come from God, clothed with the excellency of the glory of his love &c." and he concludes in these words "*As the Lord hath spoken through your Brother* and companion in the tribulation and kingdom of patience in the Lord Jesus."

The Epistle from which the following extracts are taken, is introduced by the Editor "for the information of those who have faith to receive it, as an *evi-*

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dence that the flock of Christ is not left alone and *comfortless,*" &c. &c. Here the words of W. D. are given as *evidence* that Christ's flock is not left comfortless. Was our blessed Lord's own testimony deficient in weight? "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." John xiv. 18.

P. 212 "Dear Brethren and Sisters,

Hear *the word of the Lord! thus saith the Lord*—Though you now drink the cup of adversity and eat the bread of affliction &c. &c. yet" &c. The expression thus saith the Lord, is thrice repeated in this epistle, and it concludes in these awful words "And you shall assuredly know *that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. The word of the Lord* before expressed came to me in the prison house at Warwick, the 13th day of the 1st month, 1664. W. DEWSBURY.

These extracts prove my position, namely—that Dewsbury, and other of our early Friends, while objecting to call the Bible "The word of God," scrupled not to assume that epithet for their own writings.

These are the writings which are so earnestly and indiscriminately recommended to our serious perusal, and by persons too who for the most part view with suspicion, if not with decided disapprobation, social meetings for the prayerful study of Holy Scripture.

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But the mistaken zeal of those who have thus obtruded these writings upon our reluctant attention has been overruled for good; it will I think utterly demolish their authority in matters of faith and practice, and it has demonstrated that the only safeguard against error and fanaticism, is in simple and devout submission to the paramount authority of the written word, and that the moment this is departed from, the Church is like a vessel without a rudder, left to the direction of the winds and waves, and every moment in peril of "making shipwreck."

I have not adverted to the doctrinal statements contained in this volume, but I hope they will not be suffered to pass unnoticed, as I conceive there is much which will be found not only opposed to Scripture truth, but also to those views which have been taken of later years in some of the authorised documents of the Society.

Things cannot long remain as they are: the pertinacity with which some of our members still cling to the *authority* of *our Fathers* is only equalled by their jealousy of the study of the Bible. The middle men seem to forget that we are joined issue on *essential points of doctrine*, which admit of no compromise;—they are agonising to heal a breach which they ought to thank God has been made, because it has commenced a severance between truth and error;—they writhe at the infatuated course of the ultra-conservatives, and yet court their favour; they shrink from those who are bold enough to avow what

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they feel; while the weight of the ruling party in the Society *appears* to be opposed to evangelical religion.

I would, in conclusion, entreat my Friends to observe that the scruple in question is combated, not so much as an error in itself, but as an evidence of error; for, as the symptoms of disease are not the disease itself, so I think the scruple is an evidence of low views of Holy Scripture, and symptomatic of a doctrinal disease which has assumed a variety of forms under varied circumstances, one which, I fully believe to be no other than the peculiar and unscriptural principle of a *universal and saving light.*

Principles are the springs of action; our conduct is the result of principles: if then they are founded in error, the results are not likely to be according to truth.

Now there appears to me to be ample presumptive evidence to prove that this scruple originated in an unsound principle—in an inadequate conception of the awful sanctions of the Divine Revelation—and in perverted views of the doctrine of the Spirit, —a doctrine clearly set forth in Holy Scripture, but so distorted by our early writers, and so deformed by the vexatious logic * of the schoolmen, that it came out of the hands of our Apologist in the monstrous character of an abstract † principle.

* See Wardlaw's Friendly Letters to Friends.

† See Barclay on the "Vehiculum Dei," and "Holy Scripture the Test of Truth."

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Thus originating, its results are just what might have been expected. The Bible was denied to be the primary rule of the Christian's faith and practice; and the writings of uninspired enthusiasts were elevated to that rank which is exclusively due to the word of God. Its study was neglected; and the sinner, instead of being directed to it as containing the recorded revelation of God to man, was cast back to the light within; into the deceitful imaginings of his own *unregenerate* heart, and practically led to disregard that word which is "a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path,"—of which it is also said, "*The entrance of thy words giveth light*, it giveth understanding unto the simple";—and of which our Lord himself declared "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets neither will they be persuaded *though one rose from the dead.*"!

On the other hand, a thankful acceptance of the Bible as God's Revealed Will, naturally leads to a desire to apprehend it,—that desire will lead to its devout study in a humble and prayerful spirit, while —"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law,—*even his prayer shall be abomination!*" (Prov. xxviii. 9).

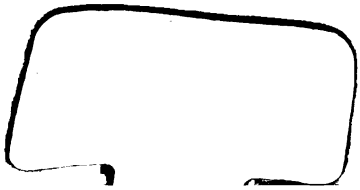
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